

ST. IGNATIUS CHURCH
2315 Brinkley Road
Oxon Hill
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-987

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. IGNATIUS CHURCH

HABS NO. MD-987

Location: 2315 Brinkley Road, Oxon Hill, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Archdiocese of Washington, 1721 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C.

Present Use: Church, religious services

Significance: St. Ignatius Church is an excellent example of a rural/suburban Queen Anne Shingle-style church, the only one of its kind in Prince George's County. The church, founded in 1849, is the second oldest Roman Catholic Church in the southwestern region of the county. The current structure, built in 1890-91, replaces the original 1849 church.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1890-91. The corner stone was laid in 1890, and the church was completed and consecrated on October 21, 1891. The current church was built on the foundations of the original church, and its 1849 cornerstone is still in place.
2. Builder, contractor, supplier: The church was built by Charles Beers, contractor of Anacostia, at a cost of \$5,000.00
3. Original plans and construction: No original plans have been discovered. It was described, however, upon its completion in October of 1891 as follows: "The new structure is thirty-eight feet front and sixty feet deep, and cost about \$5,000. The architectural style is Romanesque and the tower rises to a height of eighty feet. The seating capacity of the ground floor is 350 and of the gallery that runs across the north end, fifty more. The bell in the tower was cast by Henry McShane of Baltimore, is attuned to 'C' and weighs in gross seven hundred and thirty pounds and is the joint donation of Nicholas Brooke, George Gray, Michael Quinn and Father Hughes" (NR nomination, citing Begley, pgs 13-14).

4. Alterations and additions: Few changes have been made to the church. The wainscoting has been removed from the walls of the sanctuary. Also, the confessional box, previously located to the rear of the church, has been removed.

B. Historical Context:

The church was founded in 1849 by Father Joseph M. Finotti, S.J. upon the completion of the original church building. St. Ignatius was originally a mission under the charge of the Pastors of St. Mary's Church of Alexandria, Virginia, built to serve the community of southwestern Prince George's County, from the Potomac River to the west, and the town of District Heights to the east. It was only the second Roman Catholic Church constructed in the southwestern region of the county. As the Hopkin's Atlas of Prince George's County shows, this was a largely rural area during the early years of the church. The area later grew with suburbanization.

The current St. Ignatius Church was built beginning in 1890, as indicated by the cornerstone. It was built by Charles Beers, contractor of Anacostia, D.C., at a cost of \$5,000. It was consecrated on the 21st of October 1891 by the Cardinal of the archdiocese of Baltimore, James Gibbons, who referred to it as "the prettiest little church in Southern Maryland" (National Register nomination). It was then described as "Romanesque," a style identified by heavy masonry construction, with rounded arched window and door supports, towers with conical roofs, etc. St. Ignatius would best be described, however, as Queen Anne in style, with its polychromatic siding, tower and decorative ornament. The cornerstone of the original 1849 church remains as part of the foundation of the current church.

The church was made a parish in its own right, assigned to the archdiocese of Washington, in 1948. The parish house, located directly across Brinkley Road from the church, was built in 1948-49. A school was later added to the church complex in 1966.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: St. Ignatius exemplifies the Queen Anne style as seen in a small rural church

structure. As typical of ecclesiastical (and other) architecture of the late-19th century Victorian era, contrasting materials are used to add texture, enlivening the building's surfaces. This is translated in the church's combined used of shingles, board-and-batten and siding laid horizontally in varying widths. Also typical is the emphasis on the verticality of building as seen in the steep gables, bell tower with steeple, buttresses and the arched windows.

2. Condition of fabric: The church appears to be in very good condition, with the original fabric intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: St. Ignatius is a rectangular structure with a projecting bell tower to the center of the north front facade.

2. Foundations: The church rests on a common bond brick foundation. The building sits on a slight incline so that there is a high foundation to the rear. The foundation includes the cornerstones of both the current building and the original building on this site. The original 1849 cornerstone is located at the west side, and the 1890 cornerstone is to the north front.

3. Walls: The walls are a wonderful polychromatic mix of board-and-batten (using beaded siding and molded battens), clapboard siding, and scalloped shingles. A plain wide board serves as a water table between the brick foundation and the board-and-batten wainscoting. The wainscoting is topped with a chair-rail-like molding on which rest the window sills. There is narrow clapboard siding rising to the bottom of the round-arch of the windows, topped with a beaded board. Above this, scalloped shingles extend into the eaves. The walls of the bell tower are a combination of narrow clapboard siding--including buttresses covered in narrow siding--and scalloped shingles. The bell cote at the top is covered with a wider siding and scalloped shingles.

4. Structural system, framing: The church is of wood-frame, balloon construction.

5. Porches, stoops: There is a brick terrace to the north front of the church, with two steps up to the entry. At the rear entry is a stoop with a high platform with vertical siding, with a stairway to the side with a plain balustrade with 2" x 4" balusters.

6. Chimneys: There is a brick stack towards the rear of the building on the east slope of the roof.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entry is on the projecting bell tower at the north front of the church. There are double doors, each with a double row of four panels. It is surmounted by a stained-glass, semi-circular light in a sunburst pattern. There is a plain wide round-arch door surround. The rear entry to the east side is a single door with the same surround and semi-circular light. There is a doorway into the basement, to the rear.

b. Windows: Both of the long side elevations to the east and west are lined with six long round-arched, two-over-two-light-sash, stained-glass windows. Like the doorways, they are surround by plain wide boards. At the north front, to either side of the projecting tower, is a window--a smaller version of those that appear along the sides. In the tower, above the doorway, is a tripartite window, all sections of which are round-arched and of equal width, with the center window being slightly taller. In the bell cote portion of the tower are round-arched louvered ventilators on all sides. To the center of the rear wall is another tripartite, stained-glass window which lights the inner sanctuary.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The church has a high-pitched, gable-front roof (to accommodate the vaulted ceiling inside), covered with asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: The church roof overhangs on the sides, with a plain wide frieze under the eaves.

c. Towers: There is a projecting, squared bell tower to the center of the north facade. It rises up three stories and houses the entry and bell cote, and is topped with a steeple. The tower is sided--like the walls--with alternating clapboard siding and wood shingles. There are buttresses at the corners which rise up to near the tops of the tripartite window above the entry. A small pent roof separates the entry portion of the tower from

the bell cote above. The squared tower and bell cote are topped with a pyramidal spire with flared eaves. At the top, a cross serves as a final.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The rectangular structure is entered from a vestibule at the base of the tower. The basic plan has a center aisle and two side aisles. The center section is distinguished by a barrel-vaulted ceiling supported by square fluted piers. There is a gallery to the north front. The altar area to the south is also vaulted, with sacristy rooms to either side.

2. Stairway: There is a stairway to the gallery at the northwest rear corner of the church. It is a closed-string stair of basically a single flight, with winders at the foot of the stair. It has a solid wainscoted balustrade.

3. Flooring: The floors are covered with wall-to-wall carpeting.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are completely covered with beaded wainscoting. Like the exterior walls, the direction of the siding on the interior walls alternate, beginning with vertical wainscoting to the chair rail, above which the siding turns on a horizontal up to a molding above the windowheads, where it again is laid vertically. The ceiling too is covered with this beaded board. The center portion is barrel vaulted, and the area over the side aisles is lower and flat. The vaulted area is supported by fluted square posts, with ribs springing from the posts. The ceiling over the side aisles is frame by larger beams, which also spring from the posts. The ceiling of the altar area also has a vaulted ceiling covered with beaded board. The walls, however, are plastered.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front doorways are surrounded by symmetrically molded trim with bull's-eye corner blocks. The doorways into the sacristy rooms have a plain narrow surround.

b. Windows: The windows have heavy, symmetrically molded surrounds. At the base are large plinth blocks, resting on a molded sill. Bull's-eye

corner blocks are located at the base of the round-arched tops of the windows. The windows are of leaded stained glass in decorative floral and geometric patterns. There is a tripartite window above the altar at the rear south wall.

6. Decorative features and trim: There is a decorative altar rail with turned balusters supporting a heavy carved rail. The altar table has an overhanging top supported along the front by heavy carved columns. Above is a carved Gothic piece in the configuration of a church with Jesus on the cross inside. A gallery or choir loft runs the width of the church at the north end. It is supported at either end by piers which also supported the vaulted roof. Like the walls, the gallery is covered with beaded, vertical siding. The gallery now houses an antique pump organ. The stations of the cross, cast in a quatrefoil pattern, ornament the side walls of the church, hung in pairs between the windows.

7. Lighting: Octagonal Gothic lanterns hang from chains in the vaulted section, and are mounted on the ceiling above the side aisles.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church sits directly on Brinkley Road, facing north. The land slopes down to the rear of the church where there is a high basement.

2. Historic landscape design: There is a cemetery to the east side of the church, which predates the current structure. The tomb stones bear the names of some of the county's oldest Catholic families, including the Hills and the Brookes.

3. Outbuildings, associated buildings: There is a parish hall directly across Brinkley Road to the north, erected in 1948-49. The St. Ignatius school building is located to the southeast of the church, erected in 1966.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views: An early view of the church, date unknown, appears in Alan Virta's history of Prince George's County (courtesy of Margaret McNeil) which shows the church probably as it looked upon completion in 1891. The shingles appear to be unpainted, and the window and door surrounds, frieze board,

buttresses, and other trim pieces are painted a dark color to highlight them against the light color of the main structure.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Kerby, Mrs. Brooke (Executive Secretary of the St. Ignatius Preservation Society). National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form, prepared 3 October 1973.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Begley, Patrick J. History of St. Ignatius' Roman Catholic Church, Oxon Hill, Maryland, 1849-1949.

Hopkins, George. Atlas of Prince George's County, Maryland. Washington, D.C.: Hopkins Publishing, 1878.

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County, a Pictorial History. Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Company Publishers, 1984.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the St. Ignatius Church was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed on August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, was begun in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, made the selection of sites. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of Prince George's County history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer, Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS historian who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on site investigations.